

The Effect of Explicit and Implicit Instruction on Monolingual Bilingual EFL learners and Acquisition of L2 Grammar

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Abstract

Under which conditions, implicit or explicit, the EFL learners are exposed to L2 inputs may strongly influence the learning processes. Tasks that are accompanied with instructions are one of the most influential tools for ELT teachers for manipulating learning conditions. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the role of implicit and explicit instructions on acquisition of two grammatical structures (negative and placement adverb) and also the effect of monolingualism and bilingualism on learning grammar. 38 high intermediate learners, 10 monolingual and 28 bilingual, participated in present study. A general English proficiency test, pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test were administered. Then the scores on the pre-test and post-tests were compared to determine the possible effects. The data were analyzed by applying Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The findings revealed that: 1) there wasn't a significant difference between explicit and implicit instructions and input on acquisition the grammatical rules and 2) for more complex structure, implicit instruction was recommended and 3) monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in learning the grammar. Hence, the findings implies that in order to have an efficient L2 classrooms, ELT teachers should pay more attention on the interactions between these two types of instructions and the complexity of the L2 structures.

Key words: Explicit Instruction; Implicit Instruction; Mono lingual; Bilingual; teaching grammar

1. Introduction

Due to abundant problems with traditional approaches and methods of ELT classrooms, there has been a turn to Task-Based Learning in the field of language teaching in the recent years mainly because it fosters real communication, social interaction, and acquisition of implicit knowledge [1].

According to the relevant literature, there are large numbers of definitions for a task. Task is considered as an activity that necessarily encompasses language [2]. Moreover, task is seen as a classroom activity which focuses on meaning and help learners in operating, communicating and comprehending in target language ([3],[4]-[5]). It is also defined as those "activities which required using target language for communicative purposes to attain the determined objectives and goals [6]. Whatever the definition of a task be, one of the most significant feature is the instruction that accompanies it. The instructions which are attended by tasks can be explicit or implicit in leading learners' attention towards those aspects of the language in the input that should be learned by learners.

From the onset of the emergence of tasks as a pedagogical tool, research on task and tasks' characteristics has been an appealing domain for ELT practitioners. One of the most important problems to which ELT researchers have been faced is to what extent instructions can direct learners' attention towards different aspects of the language. Hence this study makes use of previous research and reports on the impacts of two types of task instructions, implicit and explicit, on participants' acquisition of two grammatical structures of differing difficulty.

Another important factor in which will influences learning language is that the learners are monolingual or bilingual([7],[8], [9], [10] -11]). Many scholars confirm the advantages of being bilingual over monolingual, in a number of areas and have been supported by many studies in the past few decades [12], [13]-14].

To carry out the present study, a frame work is used that is determined by Reinders to reports on outcomes of explicit or implicit instructions on acquisition of intended grammatical structures. Furthermore, the bilingual and monolingual learners are compared in terms of learning English grammatical structures. Hence, two linguistic categories, namely Negative Adverb and Adverb Placement are used for investigation.

2. Review of Literature

As it was mentioned in the preceding section, there have been a large number of researches examining the relative impacts of instructions that are more explicit compared with those that are more implicit, but this has not been the case for studies into the effects of tasks, which is the subject of the present study. And with regard that there are a lot of debates upon the effect of being monolingual and bilingual on learning the second or third language on EFL learners, here is a number of studies in two fields.

In one study, the influences of explicit instructions on acquisition of 'soft-mutations' (word-initial consonant shifts) of Welsh as a second language was examined [15]. His participants were set to receive three types of instructions namely: Exposure only, rule presentation accompanied by exposure, and rule presentation with examples, accompanied by exposure. Rule presentation condition was comprised of a list of consonants and relevant information about their mutation, but did not include any grammatical description of their underlying rules. The exposure-only group easily learned the input they were provided with, but showed little or no transfer. The group of participants who were provided with the rules slowly learned them but was unable to apply them systematically in practice. Those participants in the rule presentation plus examples group learned slowest but showed evidence of abstraction of the rules and transfer.

In one of the most important studies in this category, the effects of implicit and explicit instruction on simple and complex grammatical structures for adult language learner was investigated [16]. The results supported the thought that teaching does make a significant difference in learning, that explicit instruction is significantly better than implicit for the complex rule, that both methods are equally effective for the simple rule, and that structures do not have to match proficiency levels or be sequenced by complexity for significant learning to take place.

Other researchers have focused on monolingual and bilingual learners and attempted to explore the influence of monolingualism or bilingualism on learning a language. In one study, 124 Catalan-Spanish bilinguals were compared to 77 Spanish monolinguals [13]. Using grammar and vocabulary tests, these participants' general English proficiency was appraised. The result revealed that bilingual participants gained higher score on the tests in comparison to their counterparts. Another studied was conducted to explore the impact of monolingualism or bilingualism on language acquisition [14]. Three groups of participants 'English proficiency were measured. They

were at different age range includes nine, 12 and 17. Three different tests were run: dictation, cloze, multiple-choice grammar and listening comprehension. The findings revealed that highly proficient bilinguals obtained higher score than the monolinguals. It was also found that the oldest group accomplished better on dictation, cloze and multiple choice grammar tests.

In another research, it was found that bilinguals were better able to control their attention and performed significantly better than their monolingual counterparts on tasks in which they were given misleading information [17]. She first started with children and elaborated on 'representational analysis' versus 'attentional control' [17]. Bialystok considered the results of several studies and concluded that bilingual children have advantages over monolinguals in tasks which require a high level of control of attention (attentional control); those that include misleading, distracting or irrelevant information.

In the same vein, the probable differences between Iranian bilingual/monolingual learners of English with regard to their syntactic knowledge were examined by Maghsoudi[18]. He probed whether bilingual and monolingual learners of English differ significantly in learning embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping knowledge. The results revealed that: 1- Monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in acquiring syntactic structure, 2- no significant difference was observed between gender of monolinguals and bilinguals' performances in acquiring syntactic structure.

As it was already mentioned, considering such studies, we can gain important insights into the differential impacts of instructions, but not in the context of tasks. The present study makes use of the above-mentioned studies and reports on the effects of implicit and explicit instructions on learners' acquisition of Adverb Placement and Negative Adverb structures which are of differing complexity and also the effect of being monolingual and bilingual in learning foreign language.

2.1. Research questions

The present study seeks to answer the following question:

- 1) Is there any differential effect for implicit and explicit instructions accompanying tasks on acquisition of English adverb placement and negative adverbs?
- 2) Is there any significant difference among monolinguals and bilinguals EFL learners in learning placement and negative adverbs both implicitly and explicitly?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participant

Twenty-eight male and ten female were chosen in the present study as subjects who studied at Safir and Marefat Language Institutes in Kermanshah during spring term of 2012. They were chosen from the population of high intermediate-level learners attending General English classes. To eradicate any possibility of heterogeneity of their English knowledge, the researchers conducted a placement test earlier to the treatment of the study. The primary population was 45 students from which 7 were omitted, after attending placement test, for getting a low grade on the test and not meeting the benchmark for attending this research. Later participants had been randomly assigned to either the implicit condition group (N=19) or the explicit condition group (N=19). The implicit condition group received instructions on how to complete the task, but on the other hand the explicit condition group not only received procedural instructions but also was asked to pay attention to the target structure.

3.2. Target Structures under Study

Two grammatical structures which were applied in this study were Negative Adverb and Adverb Placement. Adverb placement involves learners in determining the correct position of the adverb in sentences, but negative adverbs are those adverbs or adverbial structures that involve learners in inversion of subject and auxiliary. Negative adverbs are more complex and less frequent than adverb placement. Examples of each structure, used in the study, are the followings:

“Rarely does Mark go on vacation”. (*Negative adverb structure*)

“My brother passionately kissed his son”. (*Adverb placement structure*)

3.3. Instrument

The study draws on a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) which was administered as a pre-test, an immediate post-test and a delayed post-test. At each test administration the order of the sentences was changed. The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the term (on the first week), the immediate post-test on the six week, and the delayed post-test on the seventh week of the term. The test composed of 30 sentences. Later participants' scores on grammaticality judgment tests were calculated. To measure participants' acquisition, their gain scores from pre- to immediate post-test, from pre- to delayed post-test and from immediate to delayed post-test were calculated. Students' responses to the GJTs' sentences that did not contain the target structure were used as the control items in this study. Total grades on these items accompanied with grades for the grammatical and ungrammatical items separately were calculated. Gain scores were then computed.

To arrive at the intended results and to investigate group differences, repeated measures analysis of variance models were used. For post-hoc analyses the Least Significant Differences (LSD) method was used. For all statistical analyses the alpha level was set at .05 and for effect sizes, Cohen's d values were calculated.

3.4. Treatments of the Study

This study draws on 3 treatment types in which learners are provided with input on above-mentioned structures. In the *dictation task* learners were demanded to listen carefully to a short text, during which they were not allowed to take notes. After that, they heard, for a second time, the same text part by part. Each part contained no more than 10 words but mostly around seven or eight. Next, they were asked to recall and write down what they had heard. In the *individual reconstruction* task learners were demanded to listen to a short text twice and then to reconstruct it. Therefore, this task involved delayed recall of what learners had heard. They were asked to talk aloud as they completed the task. The *collaborative reconstruction* task was akin to the individual reconstruction task except that two students were paired and were asked to reconstruct the text together. It therefore also involved delayed recall.

3.5. Data analysis

The data gathered by using three pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences; SPSS.16. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were calculated by applying ANOVA statistical method.

4. Result and Discussion

To find out whether the treatments of the study have had any impact on acquisition of the two intended grammatical structures, the gained scores for target items and those for the control items were calculated and then compared. In fact, a 2×3 Analysis of Variance was carried out. The results of these analyses are presented in the following tables. The first table summarizes the descriptive statistics for male and female bilingual and monolingual learners in negative adverbs.

In order to understand the amount of learning among students, related to negative adverbs, at first we consider the differences between pre-test and post-test, pre-test and delayed post-test, post-test and delayed post-test, and then ANOVA was applied for calculating the effect of various factors (methodology and number of languages) on learning negative adverbs.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for negative adverbs.

Negative adverbs				
Teaching	Linguality	N	Std	Mean
Pre-test to post-test				
implicit	Monolingual	5	.942	-.95
	Bilingual	14	1.508	-.84
	Total	19	1.357	-.87
explicit	Monolingual	5	.821	-1.40
	Bilingual	14	2.313	.09
	Total	19	2.114	-.30
Total	Monolingual	10	.866	-1.17
	Bilingual	28	1.974	-.37
	Total	38	1.776	-.58
Pre-test to delayed post-test				
implicit	Monolingual	5	2.421	-2.85
	Bilingual	14	3.479	-1.52
	Total	19	3.226	-1.87
explicit	Monolingual	5	2.966	-1.40
	Bilingual	14	5.086	-1.37
	Total	19	4.543	-1.39
Total	Monolingual	10	2.664	-2.12
	Bilingual	28	4.277	-1.45
	Total	38	3.894	-1.62
Post-test to delayed post-test				
implicit	Monolingual	5	1.981	-1.90
	Bilingual	14	3.178	-.67
	Total	19	2.911	-1.00
explicit	Monolingual	5	2.669	.00
	Bilingual	14	4.733	-1.46
	Total	19	4.266	-1.08
Total	Monolingual	10	2.431	-.95
	Bilingual	28	3.976	-1.07
	Total	38	3.602	-1.04
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects			P - value	F
Pre-test to post-test	Teaching		.714	.136
	Linguality		.226	1.521
Pre-test to delayed post-test	Teaching		.595	.288
	Linguality		.651	.209
Post-test to delayed post-test	Teaching		.686	.167
	Linguality		.930	.008

In order to understand the amount of learning among students, related to placement adverbs, we investigated the differences between pre-test and post-test, pre-test and delayed post-test, post-test and delayed post-test, and then ANOVA was applied for calculating the effect of different

factors (methodology, number of languages, and student's gender) on learning placement adverbs. At the end the level of significance for each item regarding placement adverbs were presented.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for placement adverbs

		Adverb placement		
Teaching	Linguality	N	Std	Mean
Pre-test to post-test				
implicit	Monolingual	5	1.517	-3.60
	Bilingual	14	2.117	-4.00
	Total	19	1.944	-3.89
explicit	Monolingual	5	.518	-3.65
	Bilingual	14	1.643	-2.37
	Total	19	1.530	-2.71
Total	Monolingual	10	1.069	-3.62
	Bilingual	28	2.035	-3.19
	Total	38	1.827	-3.30
Pre-test to delayed post-test				
implicit	Monolingual	5	.945	-.60
	Bilingual	14	4.159	-1.84
	Total	19	3.607	-1.51
explicit	Monolingual	5	2.509	-1.85
	Bilingual	14	6.083	-1.29
	Total	19	5.309	-1.43
Total	Monolingual	10	1.905	-1.22
	Bilingual	28	5.121	-1.56
	Total	38	4.477	-1.47
Post-test to delayed post-test				
implicit	Monolingual	5	1.212	3.00
	Bilingual	14	2.425	2.16
	Total	19	2.172	2.38
explicit	Monolingual	5	2.328	1.80
	Bilingual	14	5.616	1.09
	Total	19	4.907	1.28
Total	Monolingual	10	1.860	2.40
	Bilingual	28	4.279	1.62
	Total	38	3.785	1.83
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects			P - value	F
Pre-test to post-test	Teaching		.229	1.499
	Linguality		.501	.463
Pre-test to delayed post-test	Teaching		.840	.041
	Linguality		.845	.039
Post-test to delayed post-test	Teaching		.433	.629
	Linguality		.592	.293

The result of this study has demonstrated that implicit or low level explicit instructions are not sufficient to influence acquisition of grammatical structures which have considerable difficulty. It has also clearly illustrated that explicit instructions (in the form of a noticing instruction) do not influence acquisition of L2 structures and can even block their acquisition when compared with

implicit instructions, at least on relatively complex L2 grammatical structures. It seems that if acquisition wants to take place, the target structure either should be presented more often or a more explicit type of instructions should be provided. But much more research should be carried out to investigate and compare a larger number of more or less explicit instructional types accompanying tasks.

It is worth to mention that ELT practitioners should keep in mind that simply providing learners with input, or input with minimally explicit instructions, may not be sufficient for acquisition to take place. This may show that a relatively more direct pedagogic intervention is needed, at least where relatively complex structures are the focus of attention.

Considering the results, monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in acquiring syntactic structure. It is often believed that early exposure to two languages is detrimental to language acquisition. This belief rests on an implicit assumption that learning more than one language in early childhood necessarily produces not only confusion and interference between the languages but also impediment to learning a third language. This finding is in the same line with results of studies by some scholars such as [10] Maghsoudi (2010).

One main point that is worth to put emphasis is here is that explicit instructions can have a lower degree of influence on learning of more complex structures when it is compared with less complex ones. ELT practitioners should have an understanding of the relative complexity of the language they teach and match their instructions accordingly. More complex structures may structure.

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